

SCHOOL UNION 76

BROOKLIN – DEER ISLE-STONINGTON CSD – SEDGWICK

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Office of the Superintendent

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“Public Schools not only serve the public, they make the public.”

Superintendent’s Memo

To: CSD 13 Parents & Guardians

From: Christian M. Elkington

Re: Next Steps with High School and Middle School Soccer

Date: 8-29-2020

Many of you have read or heard that the Maine Principals Association (MPA) took action Thursday afternoon related to which sports they think should be played this fall. Their current position is that all fall sports should run, including contact sports. Also, their position is that the Maine Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) and Maine CDC’s guidelines for soccer are incorrect -- instead of being considered a “High Risk” activity, soccer should be considered a “Moderate Risk” activity. To say that confusion has reigned supreme over the last two months while the MPA has been trying to find ways for all sports to be played would be an understatement. And unfortunately, the MPA recommendations about which sports can be played is not the final answer as some are believing it to be or that the MPA, in some publications, appears to be saying.

From what I have read and been told, the next step in this process is for the MPA’s recommendations to go to MDHHS for review and then I would think the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) will also review -- not something usually done, but we are not in usual times. My best guess is that the MPA’s recommendations have been made to see if they can get changes in some of our state’s current health & safety guidelines for returning to school. After this review, I am sure another memo will come out.

Personally, I believe the MPA and Maine Interscholastic Athletic Directors Associations are trying to avoid making the tough call, which would be to assist the Maine CDC, MDHHS, MDOE and the Governor by cancelling fall contact sports in order to continue to keep the spread of COVID 19 in Maine to a minimum as we now try to open up our schools! What I thought we all have been working on together since March? They know that cancelling contact sports this fall will make many unhappy and want to avoid that if at all possible. In reviewing some of the science that has informed the MPA’s thinking about contact sports, I find it inconclusive to say the least. The ease with which COVID 19 is spread is something I would think all of us would have learned, especially recently, from the wedding held in Northern Maine where those infected, largely through community spread, has reached well over 100 and which has spread COVID 19 as far as to York County. In regards to contact sports, the MPA decision is not the right decision!

In the situation we now find ourselves in, I want to be clear about who has oversight, control and the decision-making authority over school-sponsored sports. The MPA is a private organization that oversees and sanctions sports and activities for students in Maine's public and private high schools to participate in -- *if* they so choose. They are not part of MDOE or any Maine school system and cannot order anyone to do anything. They invite schools to participate in the activities they sponsor including the tournaments they run following their rules. Each individual school system decides when and if they will participate in MPA activities.

Two weeks ago, our School Board voted, based partly on my recommendation, that we could not field the contact sport of soccer following the health and safety guidelines issued by both the national and Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I believe that following these guidelines has helped keep Maine one of the safest places in our country when it comes to COVID 19 spread. My position is that we cannot allow our students to play the contact sport of soccer by competing with teams outside our school district if we are to follow these safety guidelines. Guidelines designed to protect the people of Maine and which we are following to reopen our schools. In the end, after receiving any further guidance from Maine CDC, Maine Dept. of Health & Human Services and the Maine DOE, it will probably be left to your School Board, based on my recommendation to either reconsider the decision already made or to move on from their original decision and, when the time comes, make a decision about winter season sports.

While we are very aware that our decisions have made some unhappy, please know that your School Board and I are not making these decisions lightly and are aware of the significant impact on the students affected. The health and safety of our students, staff, families and communities continues to be our number one priority.

Thanks for listening.